



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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a slang term) to "chuck the whole show" for evermore; but if your object be to interest your pupil in Nature, to make an all round Naturalist of him, who shall be able to impart his own interest in Nature to younger people; then you will begin, as Miss Hodgson does, with the things themselves, instead of definitions you will give facts, you will encourage your pupil to make out for himself what he can; instead of requiring schedules you will ask for sketches of what he actually sees, and if there is any aptitude at all in him, and I believe there are very few who are really destitute of any feeling for Nature, you will have laid a sound foundation on which if it is ever afterwards wanted a structure of scientific specialism can be safely reared.

I do not suppose that anyone here will want or expect to be told or convinced of the great advantage to be gained by Nature study, of the widening of the powers of observation, and what an American author has called the "mental uplift" of it, or of the solace and relief to be derived from having a pure and elevating hobby (if you will call it so) to which to turn at intervals among the worry and trouble of necessary avocations. To quote the same author again, "every one" of your pupils "will some day need the solace and the rest which Nature Lore can give." But there is even a higher view of the subject than these, which has been summed up by a fellow-townsmen of my own in time long past, Sir Thomas Browne, who wrote, "There are two books whence I collect my divinity; besides that written one of God, another, His servant Nature, that universal and public manuscript, that lies exposed unto the eyes of all"; and it is this manuscript that Miss Mason and Miss Hodgson are teaching their students to read, that they in their turn may interpret it to their pupils.

AN EX-STUDENT OF THE HOUSE OF EDUCATION testified to the value of the teaching of Nature Lore at Ambleside, and her own experience of the great pleasure such knowledge brought with it. She thought that the Nature Note-Books were remarkable as indexes of the students' characters, and might be useful guides to parents who were choosing teachers for their children. She also gave some instances of the interest in Nature she had been able to arouse in her pupils.

MISS MASON thanked Mr. Geldart very warmly for all he had done for the House of Education.

MISS HART-DAVIS spoke of the work of the Natural History Club in connection with the Reading Branch, which, she said, was almost too large for convenience, numbering 170 members. Lectures were given in the winter on geological subjects, pond-life, &c., followed in April by excursions in the neighbourhood bearing as far as possible on the subjects of the lectures.

REV. F. S. COLMAN said that in these days of competition there was a tendency to study only such subjects as apparently "pay" best, and leave out the study of Nature, wherein he considered lay one of the elements of attaining success and happiness in life, and which could not in any way be considered waste of time. He hoped that such opportunities as were afforded by the Natural History Club, would gradually spread.

The Morning Session concluded by a meeting of local Secretaries, to which Branch Representatives and members of the Committee were invited. Many useful suggestions as to future work were made at this meeting.

NOTES OF MISS MASON'S LECTURE (5.30 p.m.).

At 15, Belgrave Square, W. (by kind permission of Her Grace the Duchess of Bedford), a drawing room meeting was held, at which the REV. CANON BARNETT presided. He said: "Ladies and gentlemen, when Miss Mason is about to speak to a meeting of the Parents' National Educational Union, the chairman has no other duty but to be silent and listen to what she has to say."

MISS MASON said that it gave her great pleasure to see so large an audience and to have had such a kind welcome from them, and she added, "We are all gratified to have had such a gracious reception at the house of Her Grace the Duchess of Bedford." She then began her address on

THE DIRECTION OF THE WILL, AND THE REGULATION OF THE DESIRES,

by impressing on her audience a fact on which she had before dwelt, viz., that the person of a human being is one and

indivisible, and that in speaking of the Will and the Desires it is not intended to treat of rival forces, but of the different ways in which a human being brings these forces to bear.

"There are certain Desires," continued Miss Mason, "which are proper to every human being; certain things we all want, and cannot help wanting, which are not in themselves vicious or virtuous, but are just human nature. It is very wholesome to know this, as it gives us faith to work for the degraded and wicked, because we know them to be actuated by the same springs of conduct as ourselves."

Every human being has the *desire of knowledge*; everybody wants to know. It is a mere platitude to repeat that "The child asks questions which the philosopher cannot answer." This desire Miss Mason considered to be divinely implanted for the sustaining of intellectual life, and would be found among savages and the inhabitants of all countries. "But," she continued, "you will say that you know many people who have no desire to know, who take no interest in lectures, books or public events!" Such people, Miss Mason maintained, had indeed the desire of knowledge, but directed towards such objects as dress and gossip, which supply the place of intellectual food. The desire cannot be quenched, but may be degraded and allowed to run into wrong channels.

"Beware," said Miss Mason, "that no tendency to gossip is allowed to creep into the nursery! Do not let the children even hear remarks about other people at table. They sink into a child's mind and become its food. Set up a desire for the very best in literature and nature lore; it is as easy to set up a desire to know 'the latest thing out' in nature as in the world."

What the parents find interesting, Miss Mason felt sure the children would want to know, and desire to find out, so that parents should regulate their own lives for their children, and revere them.

Another natural human desire, which Miss Mason described as neither virtuous nor vicious, was the *desire for society*. "This," she said, "may work for virtue or vice according as it is directed."

"I wish," continued Miss Mason, "that young children could be taught to select their society. That they should

know that a child of a common mind, or who tells tales and has not nice instincts should be guarded against, and that without any rudeness they should simply withdraw from such society. Do we exercise our human rights sufficiently in this direction? Do we choose the companionship of those who can help us intellectually, morally, spiritually? For we were provided with the desire for society in order that we might get the best from one another. It is doubtful whether any *one* mind has the power of generating an idea all by itself, and the vital part of character is brought out by the society of others. I am ashamed to think how much use is made of set phrases which are handed from one to another and then pass as 'public opinion,'" said Miss Mason.

The desire for society should be regulated, she thought: children have a natural instinct for choosing their society, and they soon learn that "Mother" doesn't care for dress or position, but likes a nice child whose manners are gentle and frank. Another desire, which Miss Mason considered universal, is the *desire for esteem and approbation*. Nurses seem to know all about this desire, for how often do we not hear them say, "What will Mrs. So-and-So think of this untidy nursery?" or, "let me wash those dirty hands before your Auntie sees them," and the little person to whom it is addressed, generally responds at once to the expostulation. But, unfortunately, nurses go even further in this respect by saying, "God will not love you if you do that," which is too sad to think of, for children are given to brooding and this terrible thought gets fixed in the physical substance of the brain and is most of all to be guarded against.

This desire of esteem, wrongly directed, is the cause of loss of character and personality. People lay themselves out for the admiration of others, and often arrange their houses, rooms and many other things simply according to "how it's done," whereas we should all make the initial effort of doing things for ourselves.

In bygone days, Miss Mason thought, the feeling expressed by the words "What would Mrs. So-and-So think," was employed in a better way than now, for the child was thereby taught to honour and reverence all men, which is the end towards which this desire should lead, whereas nowadays it is no unfrequent thing for children to feel that they are, for

instance, being dressed merely that "Mrs. So-and-So" may think well of their appearance. "Though," urged Miss Mason, "this applies more to those lower down the ladder than to the upper classes."

"With growing boys and girls," she continued, "parents should be on the alert, not to allow the desire of appreciation to run away with them, but teach them as a principle to do an action for its own sake, when they will hurt nobody's feelings, and treat all men with honour."

Another desire mentioned by Miss Mason was that of *excelling*, which we show in everything; in our purchases and in our games we show this wish, which is perfectly natural but must be regulated, or it will ruin the intellectual power of the nation. Parents are unfortunately more prone to ask their children, "What marks did you get? What place did you take," than "What have you studied? What have you learnt?" And in schools the fetish of examination results is set up instead of the love of knowledge.

"I do not find the girls and boys of to-day," continued Miss Mason, "full of interest in the subject they are studying or running to the encyclopedia to get more information about some distinguished person, whose name has cropped up in the school work. I do not think they are filled with 'divine curiosity'; they merely want to do the thing best and get the highest marks. I think if you follow them into the schoolroom, you will find them energetically taking notes, but not consumed by eager interest in the subject. They have not time to do so, because they have to take a good place, and, if they are boys, to earn their own future from the age of twelve onwards. For if a boy once takes a scholarship he has nothing before him but to grind. Some children have individuality enough not to be crushed by this process, which destroys the balance of character by suppressing the desire of knowledge and increasing emulation. It is a tendency of our age, not through any inherent iniquity on the part of parents, for evil is wrought through want of thought as well as want of heart. But I do not think the subject of the balance of desires has been sufficiently considered, and I want you to do so earnestly. At the same time the desire of *excelling* has its own lawful position: 'Virtue kindling at a rival power and emulously rapid in the race.'"

Miss Mason then proceeded to speak of the *desire of power*, without which, she said, we should make no efforts, and which should be directed so that it be used for the benefit and help of others. If ambition be that for service, we shall bring up men and women who will raise the tone of society by sinking self in order to help and benefit others.

The *desire of wealth*, Miss Mason considered as common to every human being, in fact a sort of defensive desire for our well-being. This should, however, be regulated, and the child should learn early that money is not our sole wealth. "We think of money as a force," she added, "but character is an infinitely stronger force. Men of fine character will achieve more than men of millions."

Miss Mason considered that children's collections were sometimes the cause of greediness and of a little undue triumph over others, but that we should not remove all fields for natural desires, but rather seek to regulate them. This could only be done by parents, for the desires were often discernible in such infinitesimal ways as to escape the notice of others.

"But who is to regulate our desires?" asked Miss Mason. "Owing to the strange complexity of our natures we regulate our desires by 'the will.' We know quite well how trying it is to decide an important matter, and the repose which we feel when it is done, and we also know that the decider of our lives is called the will. The exercise of the will is almost the greatest of our modes of action, but it is not a force for good unless we have a trained conscience to help us in finding out right and wrong and the inspiring Spirit to guide us."

"How does the will work?" said Miss Mason. "In the simplest way. The person takes a thing, regards it, fixes his attention upon the matter in hand, and having considered all points arrives at a decision. Brain and mind working together on the matter come to what is called a decision. There are many nursery mistakes on the subject of will. If a child scream for the sugar-bowl, 'he has such a strong will,' says the nurse, and the mother is secretly gratified, because she thinks that in the future he will dig himself a place in this hard world of ours. But in reality the child is a slave to his appetites, his desires, or

his affections. What we mistake for strong will really denotes *want* of will. For will-power has one special characteristic. Our wills cause us to do what we do *not* like, while the nursery ebullitions are generally called forth by efforts to get or to do what we do like. How then are we to make ourselves do what we ought? There is nothing for it but to change our thoughts. And here parents have the secret of success, for they can change the thoughts of their children from what they crave to what they ought to do or be. If we studied this we should all find things easier, and should grow in the religious life. We ought therefore to train children by degrees, to get this will-power over themselves by setting up interests or hobbies outside themselves, for we know that many a nervous breakdown is caused not by work, but because one train of thought gets possession of the brain and thought cannot be turned in other directions."

All this, said Miss Mason, in conclusion, is nothing new, but just part of the work of self-management, yet it will have great influence, if taken into serious consideration, in giving us this most important power.

A vote of thanks to Miss Mason, Canon Barnett, and the Duchess of Bedford was then proposed by MR. ROOPER and carried with acclamation.

CANON BARNETT replied on behalf of Miss Mason, the Duchess of Bedford and himself. He expressed his pleasure at being present and justified that position by his conviction that the Parents' National Educational Union is very necessary to national education. He thought it had created a new atmosphere in educational matters "charged with the oxygen of intellectual curiosity and sweetened by moral thought."

FRIDAY, *May 13th*, AT PORTMAN ROOMS.

SIR VINCENT K. BARRINGTON, who took the chair, said: Ladies and gentlemen, in the absence of Dr. Helen Webb, who is unfortunately abroad, I have been asked to take the chair to-day. Mr. Rooper, I am sure, requires no introduction from me here, for we are all very grateful for his valuable contributions to the *Parents' Review*, and we much appreciate his presence, and that of Sir George Kekewich on Wednesday. The influence of the Parents' Union extends beyond its membership, and the proof is that so many schools are now professing reformed systems of education. It has been my lot to travel much in the southern districts of America, and you will be surprised to hear that the hot-blooded inhabitants are now making the question of education a prominent one, and that they held a conference at Caraccas, which lasted, not four days, but three weeks! It is also a burning question in Bulgaria, where, during the period of so-called "atrocities," the schools were carried on in spite of the interference of the Turkish government, thus securing the success of the Bulgarians when emancipated from Turkish rule. In Germany, where little boys play at commerce instead of with mud pies, I saw, during the war of 1870-71, the German soldiers actually leading the little French children to school so that their instruction might not be interrupted. In the London Chamber of Commerce, too, the question of the education of children, so as to fit them as members of the commercial world, is a prominent one. Although brought up as I have been on the conventional lines and in a thoroughly conservative way, I have seen so many grand characters utterly wasted because of the absence of certain qualities which we claim can be impressed on young children, if we begin young enough, that I have been converted to the principles of the Parents' National Educational Union and have tried to convert my friends.